Japanese And Chinese Immigrant Activists

Josephine Fowler

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In the wake of Chiang Kai-shek’s anti-Communist coup in April 1927, as the ongoing intraparty struggle within the KMT in America became ever more fierce, the presence of Chinese immigrants in the American Party was formalized through the formation in May of a Chinese Bureau of the W(C)P. Two months later, with the end of the KMT-CCP united front in China, there was a corresponding collapse of cooperative relations between the KMT in America and the W(C)P. Indeed, the latter struggle culminated in early 1928 with “instructions from CI and CEC to dissolve all branches of the KMT that we controlled and to withdraw from the KMT” and the forced resignation of Chinese immigrant Communists from their positions working for the KMT official party organ Kuo Min Yat Po.1

In this chapter, I examine the activism of left-wing Chinese from the time of the above sequence of events in the spring of 1927 through the latter part of 1933. Until the early 1930s, activists devoted much attention to events in China and also expressed strong interest in returning to China at some not too distant time to participate directly in the revolutionary movement there. By late 1933, anticipating the shift in the larger Party toward the policies of the Popular Front, the Central Committee of the Chinese Bureau of the CPUSA (renamed as such in 1929) had moved away from policies that isolated the Chinese Party members from surrounding Chinese communities and toward more broad-based cooperation with organizations that shared “similar ends in view” and that enabled “draw[ing] in unorganized and undeveloped workers.” At the center of these new efforts was the mass organization American Friends of the Chinese People, formed in the spring of 1933. Even as the activists began to embrace this new policy, they continued to put much energy into finding ways to support the Chinese Revolution and sustain close ties with the CCP.2

At the same time, Chinese immigrant party members were also forced to wage another struggle within the movement itself. Problems mounted:
isolation within the Party and local Chinese communities; small memberships and the repeated loss of leading members through their departures for Moscow and China; a perpetual lack of funds; ongoing and bitter factional struggles within district and national party leaderships; harassment by the KMT and immigration authorities along with the ever-present threat of arrest leading to deportation; and the party leadership’s neglect of issues concerning Chinese communities inside the United States. Complicating matters further and contradicting their construction as natives of China, Chinese immigrant activists were expected to conform to policies that construed all members of the American Party as eligible to become naturalized “Americans.” Even individual party leaders who worked closely with and demonstrated their commitment to sustaining the Chinese activists’ efforts nonetheless were most interested in the fight to support the revolutionary forces in China and defend the Soviet Union. In developing strategies and organizing at the local level, therefore, the activists were largely alone.

**Collapse of the KMT-CCP United Front and Formation of the Apparatus of Chinese-Language Work in the Party**

Organizational efforts advanced quickly during the second half of 1927. On April 13, 1927, the District 13 DEC resolved that a “Chinese fraction be formed,” and around the beginning of May the “fraction was organized.” In October, at the First National Convention Conference held in Chicago, participants wrote a constitution for the Chinese National Fraction in America. In November, the National Buro or Bureau (also known as Central Buro) of the Chinese National Fraction was established, “consisting of 5 members” and “situated in S. F.” At the end of that year, approval was given to launch a weekly mimeographed Chinese-language “Chinese Communist paper,” *Kungchang.*

In their biography of first secretary of the Chinese National Bureau Shi Huang (aliases Tontien and Dongsheng), Yang Zundao and Zhao Luqian recount, “Shi Huang and some others secretly established the Chinese Bureau under the leadership of the CC of the Communist Party of America.” The Chinese Bureau, they continue, embarked on an ambitious program: public condemnation of Chiang Kai-shek and “the rightist faction of the Nationalist Party,” defense of Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s Principles, and a dizzying level of communist activism. Overall, they set “as their primary objectives to promote and support the revolutionary cause in China.”

According to a report delivered at the Second National Conference of the Chinese Fraction, held February 19–21, 1929, in New York City, at the time of the First National Conference there were only “two and half and not well-organized branches”; “there was no regular Buro,” and “the Fraction at first was absolutely secret.” Moreover, “the delegates did not only return to their units but left the States right after the Conference.” In September of 1927 the
Fraction had a total of eighteen members, of whom ten were “workers” and eight were students. Two other members had recently “left U.S. for Europe.”

Given these numbers, it is not surprising that other sources give far more subdued accounts of the work carried out under the leadership of the Chinese Buro during the months following its formation. An unnamed “Chinese comrade,” who delivered a “Chinese report” to a District 13 DEC meeting held in San Francisco in early May 1928, first stated the aims of the fraction: “to carry on work among the Chinese workers, do anti-Imperialist work and to train comrades to go back to China and carry on the work there.” After noting that the National Buro was located in San Francisco and citing Party membership figures (a total of “about 24,” with “5 in S.F.; 8 in N.Y.; 3 in Chicago; 3 in Madison and 4 in Philadelphia”), he proceeded to detail the activities pursued during the past year. In what became a trend, not the members of the “C P group” but rather the members of the “C Y Group [Chinese Youth],” numbering “about 9 in S.F.,” had been most active. They had “organized a workers club with about 19 member [sic],” “publish[ed] a paper regularly,” and “conduct[ed] many mass meetings.” They were also “organizing a restaurant workers union” and trying “to establish a workers school under the auspices of the students group,” which was “under the control of the C Y group.” In the wake of the KMT-CCP split in China, the removal of “our editor,” Xu, from the “KMT paper,” and withdrawal of Party members from the KMT, the main endeavor undertaken by the activists was to form, in January 1928, a “united front organization,” Meizhou Yonghu Zhongguo Gong-Nong Geming Da Tongmeng (Grand Alliance to Support the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolution, ACWP) with “the purpose of attacking and exposing the KMT.” The ACWP soon began issuing a mimeographed Chinese-language weekly newspaper *Xianfeng Zhoukan* (The Vanguard) as its official organ. ACWP also established other branches in cities with significant numbers of progressive Chinese.

Even as they acted within the confines of the ethnic enclave in San Francisco, the activists boldly endeavored not only to extend their reach into the English-speaking national arena but also to persuade Japanese Party members to act in solidarity in both national and immigrant arenas. To address the “Present Chinese-Japanese Situation,” the activists “decided to issue a statement in English on the present situation.” If all went as planned, publication of “the statement in the Japanese, Chinese and daily press” and the organization of “mass meetings and protests against Japanese intervention” would follow “a meeting with the Japanese comrades.” By mid-May, the Chinese Buro and Japanese Fraction in District 13 issued a “joint statement and leaflet” addressed to “WORKERS AND FARMERS OF CHINA, JAPAN, AND AMERICA” and linked the collective struggles of the three groups.

Four months earlier, in a letter to AAAIL Secretary Gomez, Chinese activists in San Francisco shed further light on the prospects for “spreading the ideas of communism and revolution among the Chinese workers and students”
in America. They summed up the dilemma as follows: “Nearly all the Chinese residents here are Cantonese . . . Only two of the seven Chinese comrades here (Suarez [Fee] and Tsetung [S. S. Lo, also Luo Jingyi]) are Cantonese, while the rest are not Cantonese and cannot speak the Cantonese dialect.” Actually, one “comrade,” Luo Jingyi, in San Francisco was not only a native speaker of Cantonese but also a talented orator and teacher who “moved everybody in the audience” when she delivered speeches to San Francisco’s Chinese community about the Chinese people’s “resistance against imperialism” and who under Shi Huang’s instruction also gave lessons in Mandarin to the community. Most other activists found it “very difficult for us to work among a people with whom we cannot communicate in the same language. This language difference has greatly handicapped our work in the past.” In addition, “all the Chinese Comrades here are students, not workers,” which made it “difficult for the students to mix up with the workers and still the more difficult when the former are engaged in their studies.” Moreover, “the majority of the Chinese comrades here are ‘outsiders,’ and do not intend to stay in American [sic] for more than five years.” Thus, “at present we can hardly get some chinese [sic] workers here into our fraction and even if we can, they are not qualified to take important responsibilities.”

The last two points were not strictly true since YCL member Fee had been working “at various jobs as a cook in San Francisco” since his arrival in the United States in 1923. Similarly, Xavier Dea had been “a restaurant worker, a fruit gatherer, and did some other kinds of work” since he had come to the United States in 1923. These comments raise an important issue that left-wing Chinese activists later acknowledged at their Second National Conference in February 1929, when they looked self-critically at their efforts thus far: one of “the principal causes of our defects” was “underestimation of the revolutionary potentialities of the masses, condemnation of masses, segregation from masses, and defetism [sic].” Being active in local Chinese communities was ironically more difficult than at national and international levels.

A month earlier, Shi had reported to Gomez that the first meeting of the Central Bureau of the Chinese National Fraction, held on November 20, 1927, in San Francisco, had grappled with two pressing and knotty matters, namely, “APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP” and “THE QUESTION OF APPROACHING THE CHINESE AS COMMUNISTS.” The crux of the second dilemma was that “the Central Bureau holds that unless some Chinese comrades are ready to approach the Chinese as communists and openly preach Communism, it will be very difficult to win over the Chinese workers and sympathizers to our side. But there is danger of being deported if the American Government discovers.” In theory, the solution was straightforward: “find some Chinese comrades who have American citizenship, to do this work.” It was agreed that the “Central Bureau should proceed immediately to investigate the names, addresses, occupations, native place, and past histories of all the Chinese comrades in
America and prepare a list." Implementing the solution, however, proved far more difficult. At the Second National Conference held more than a year later, “native place” was not included in the membership tables or mentioned in the discussion. Rather, one had to go to the second to last page of the report, in the section “TASKS OF THE CHINESE FRACTION,” to find a reiteration of the earlier directive: “Recruit more working class elements and native born Chinese into the Party.” The consensus of the meeting in mid-December 1927 in San Francisco was more realistic: “It is impossible to carry on the entire C P work openly in America. Even when possible, the scope of activities is very limited.”

In addressing the question of recruiting members, focus shifted from within the Chinese community to the relationship between the Chinese activists and the larger party leadership. The participants decided upon two “method[s] of procedure.” According to the first scenario, the DO should refer a Chinese applicant’s “application card” to the “imperialist Committee of the National Office of the American Party and the Imperialist Committee will refer it to the Central Bureau of the Chinese National Fraction for approval.” Alternatively, the “Chinese Branches may also introduce new members.” However, in the event an applicant was considered “suspicious,” not only should the first method “be resorted to” but also “approval of the National office of the American Party should be obtained.” A month later, members of the central Anti-Imperialist Committee, led by Director of the Anti-Imperialist Department Manuel Gomez, approved a motion that reaffirmed the authority of the Chinese Bureau: “we approve the recommendations of the Chinese Bureau relative to the approach of new members and relative to the regulations for taking Chinese members in to the Party.”

Meanwhile, the Party leadership had already arrived at a decision on the matter. About seven months earlier and in response to Levin’s question, Lovestone reaffirmed the authority of the Party leadership: “All members must go through the National Office when they are received, so that we may check up with the connections we have here.” In his letter, Levin had also raised the issue of disclosure. He understood that Chi was “in charge” of “admission of Chinese to the Party,” and that Chi had informed Shi that their membership was “to be [kept] secret from the rest of the party.” While he considered this “a very wise move at this time,” there seemed “to be a tendency here to treat this question by some of the other members just as we would other workers.” To this, Lovestone responded, “In almost all cases the connection should be confidential, not public. This does not mean they should not attend unit meetings, however. They should participate in unit meetings, but should exercise greater care than others.”

Confusion, if not open disagreement, over the rules is evident. Lovestone’s statement once again revealed the basic contradictions in the Party’s treatment of its Chinese members. Like “other workers,” all Chinese membership applications must “go through the National Office,” but the National Office’s
evaluation of these applications turned to “the connections we have here.” Most likely these contacts were valued for their access to information about each individual’s relationship to the KMT branches in America and China as well as to the CCP. In simultaneously denying the special circumstances of Chinese members and recommending that they remain ever sensitive to these circumstances, Lovestone was both perpetuating the age-old misreading of the situation confronting the Chinese in America and placing the burden of exclusion on the shoulders of the Chinese activists themselves.

Left-wing Chinese immigrant activists, however, could never forget the realities of exclusion and discrimination. As they noted at their Second National Conference in February 1929, “Our work among Chinese in America cannot fail to give due attention to the question of national minority,” namely, the “vicious racial prejudice fostered by American imperialists and the social political, and economic discrimination and oppression against the Chinese.”

This first cohort of leading Chinese immigrant party members, seeking to maintain connections with China, demonstrated a strong orientation toward events in China and much interest in returning to China in the near future to participate directly in the revolutionary movement there.

Until the end of 1927 left-wing activists devoted much energy to working inside the KMT in branches across the United States, as well as in Canada, Tampico, Mexico, and Cuba, and “under the name of the KMT” even as they debated whether to continue the policy of cooperation. In a jointly written letter relayed by Shi in early December, Chi and Y. C. Chang reported on their interview in France with the former head of the political department of the Chinese revolutionary army Comrade Teng Yen Ta. They had learned that the “majority of the Chinese communist party are not in favor of cooperating with the KMT as they did before.” Although they had not been informed of the “attitude of the Communist International,” Chi and Chang believed that “we should change our policy.” More specifically, they “express[ed] the opinion that the policy of the Chinese national Frac-tion in America should be on the same line with the Chinese Party.” They were “in favor of converting the KMT members directly into Communists.” They “also stress[ed] the importance of organizing the left wingers of the KMT.” Shi reported that the next issue of the left-wing Chinese-language newspaper Hu Tang Te Kan (HTTK), of which he was editor and Fee manager, would “be devoted to the discussion of cooperation between the KMT and the Communist Party,” calling attention to the fact that this was “at present the most important question confronting every responsible member of the party.”

This question lay at the center of the raging battle then taking place at the highest levels of the Comintern over the disastrous failure of the united front policy. In late December, members of the Party’s central Anti-Imperialist Committee began to debate such questions as how Chinese immigrant Communists should “prepare for a split in the KMT here” while at the same time
“immediately organizing all possible forces in a left wing, welding together expelled branches and connecting them with left wing the [sic] in the KMT, etc.” A motion was passed that explicitly linked the Chinese immigrant Communists directly to the revolutionary movement in China, even at the cost of any support for the activists’ commitments to U.S.-based activism. “The chief task of the Chinese Communists in America is to mobilize around themselves and their leadership the Chinese workers and peasants in an open organization, locally and later on nationally, for the purpose of giving organized support to the Chinese Revolution.” in using the descriptor “Chinese workers and peasants” to refer to Chinese laborers in the United States, the national leadership once again betrayed its confusion of the same with Chinese in China and its dogmatic application of a China-based model to the U.S. context.

Building Mass Organizations of “Asiatic Workers”

When it came to anti-imperialist initiatives and mass organizations, Party leaders generally marginalized “Asiatic workers.” Records of the AAAIL—which, like ACWP, was formed sometime in early 1928—mention the existence of neither the ACWP nor the organization that succeeded it by the end of 1929, the All-America Alliance of Chinese Anti-Imperialists (AACAI—also known as the Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance of America). Rather, one finds only scattered references to anti-imperialist organizations of Chinese in the United States and to “Orientals” as “individuals and representatives of organizations.” Nor were members of ACWP invited to participate in the AAAIL’s “national tour on the subject ‘The Struggle Against World Imperialism, The Frankfort Congress and Latin-America.” Only more than halfway into the tour did the Secretariat of District 13 decide that speakers would include “Fee, Filipino (if possible).” This, despite the fact that by the beginning of 1929 the ACWP had extended its reach across the Americas, with “9 branches in Canada, Cuba, Mexico and the U.S.,” and a number of leading left-wing and Communist Chinese immigrant activists were appointed to the General Council of the U.S. Section of the AAAIL, which, like the ACWP, was headquartered in New York City. Among Party members were K. M. Chen, Li Tao Hsuan (“Chinese, student”), Zhang Bao (Mo Zhengdan and Me Guoshi, aliases Xuehan and James Mo, also referred to as “Chinese, student”), Y. Y. Cheng, and Chi. Among non-Party members were (H. T.) Tsiang (referred to as “Chinese, intellectual”), and Thomas T. Y. Hu (Hu Dunyuan), as representative of the Chinese Students’ Alliance. The council also included three leading left-wing Filipino immigrant activists—Ricardo Talentino (referred to as “Filipino, worker”), I. A. San Jose (referred to as “Filipino, liberal (from Seattle)”) and Pablo Manlapit (referred to as “Filipino, intellectual”)—and the leading Issei Communist, K. Nishino, as representative of the JWA as a whole.
For their part, in January 1929 Fee reported that the Chinese Fraction had resolved to organize an “Oriental branch, of All America Anti Imperialist League,” toward which aim “the Chinese Fraction and Japanese comrades formed the Sino-Japanese Anti Imperialist Federation.” Although “this league is not yet functioning,” the Chinese activists were nonetheless “prepared to draw up the work for all Oriental workers on the Pacific Coast for Anti Imperialist work.” At the same time, in the months leading up to the National Conference in February the bureau made plans to extend its networks across the Americas by sending Fee on a trip across Canada, Shi to Cuba, and Li across the United States. In so doing, the activists also laid claim to the resources of their own party by asking it to furnish “the addresses of the national offices of the Parties in Canada and Cuba” and to notify the same of Fee’s and Shi’s upcoming tours and for “the CEC to send us the sum of 250.00 at once” for travel expenses.

This is not to say that extending such networks at the regional scale was simple. Shi acknowledged the complexity at the beginning of a lengthy report on his trip: “The fact that the Cuban Party is underground, that I cannot speak the Spanish language, and that my activities have been closely watched by many Chinese in Cuba greatly hampered my work there.” Moreover, the “connection” he had obtained from the National Office in America was “old” and “useless.” And five days after his arrival in Havana, he found himself embroiled in the battles between the “Cheng Yee KMT (left wing KMT)” and the Chiang Pei-dum group (“official KMT in Cuba”) and having to fight off immediate deportation. Yet, in the end the “Cuban comrades” reportedly told Shi “that one result of my trip to Cuba should be a better connection between both parties.” In fact, the strength of these ties was demonstrated in December 1929 when Shi, who was then in Moscow for Party training before his return to China, learned that Cuban Communist Party members Li Juzhi, Rong Jichen, and Deng Haishan, whom he had “recommended” to the Cuban Party, had been arrested by the Cuban government and threatened with imminent deportation. Shi wrote to Foster to relay a message from then secretary of the Chinese Buro Li that the men “were trying to go to some other Latin-American-countries.” In the belief that this plan would not materialize, Shi urged Foster to act on Li’s recommendation to prepare to “send them to the Chinese Communist University in Moscow,” in particular by “securing the money” for their passage when Foster was next in Moscow. In a further testament to the strength of the ties between Chinese and Japanese activists, Kenmotsu reported having “rescued these three comrades who lacked any legal means”—this “by getting on the ship when not many people [in the Party] knew about the arrival of the ship [in San Francisco en route to Japan].”

Perhaps spurred to action by the efforts of the Chinese and Japanese activists, sometime in the first part of 1929 the national Party leadership took the initiative. The Administrative Committee of the U.S. Section of AAAI issued
a “Call for a National Convention of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League (United States Section). To Be Held in New York City, April 20–21, 1929.” Among other groups, the call was “addressed to all anti-imperialist organizations of Chinese, Japanese, Hindoos [sic] and others residing in the United States . . . as well as to all the branches of the United States Section of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League.” As it happened, given the convening of “special Negro, Latin-American and Far Eastern conferences,” the New York conference was pushed to June 15 and broadened to include conferences in Chicago and San Francisco. The timing of the Party’s actions was connected to the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence scheduled for July. In “view of this, and under the instructions of the International Secretariat,” AAAIL International Representative Louis Gibarti wrote the secretariat “to request the C.P. of the U.S.A. to give the utmost possible support to this important international work.”

In mid-May the District 13 DEC formed a committee to organize “a Pacific Coast Bureau of our Asiatic fractions, which shall work toward the building of mass organizations of Asiatic workers, with the aim of calling a conference to organize an Asiatic federation, mostly along anti-Imperialist lines.” At a meeting a week later, the group learned that Gibarti had written that a regional Anti-Imperialist League Conference was to be held no later than June 2, 1929. Two days after that, the “Committee on Oriental Work” met to discuss this matter; and later that night newly appointed District 13 DO Emil Gardos wrote to Gibarti informing him of the committee’s criticisms—the problem of “slowness of the National Office in informing us about this Conference” and the more serious charge “that no anti-imperialist work whatsoever was done in the past. All the comrades know of was the formation of some Party-committee last year, which did not work whatsoever.” There was no reference to San Francisco-based Chinese activists’ anti-imperialist efforts.

Still, recognizing “the importance of this work,” the committee “decided to go ahead,” to convene the “Western Conference” on June 23. Plans included “the arranging of smaller conferences through the Seattle District and the Los Angeles Subdistrict,” which would then “send delegates to the Frisco Conference,” and the mobilizing of “a group of people to sign the call.” Gardos elaborated,

We are laying of course great emphasis to the drawing in of the Mexicans, Orientals, Negroes etc in this work. Among the signers of the Conference call we hope to have the editors of the Chinese left Kuo-min-tang paper, Pa blo [sic] Manlapit, who is in L. A.[,] the chairman of the CUCM (Mexican indep. Union in Los Angeles) and a few more representatives of oppressed peoples . . .

We will also try to secure prominent liberals, such as Upton Sinclair, Robert Whittaker, Austin Lewis, etc and active AFL trade-unionists,
presidents of 1–2 local unions, together with our own comrades to sign the call, such as [Anita] Whitney, H[arrison]. George, Japanese and Chinese comrade, etc.

These were ambitious and surprising plans indeed—ambitious in regard to “the drawing in of the Mexicans, Orientals, Negroes”;49 surprising because of the aim to bring together such a broad constituency at a time when the Party was for the most part openly hostile to cooperating with “liberals” and “AFL trade-unionists.” The same might be said of the desire to obtain the signatures of the “editors of the Chinese left Kuo-min-tang paper,” when more than a year ago the paper’s left-wing staff members had been forced to resign. In any case, it was “the opinion of the DEC that there is a splendid field for anti-imperialist work in the Western Coast and we are going to do our best in that direction.”50

When the Western Regional Conference of the AAAIL, U.S. Section, opened on Sunday, June 30, 1929, in San Francisco’s California Hall, a remarkably diverse group of sixty-two delegates representing fifty-two organizations assembled. After greeting the delegates, Secretary of the Arrangements Committee Anita Whitney “proposed a Presidium of nine members” that reflected this diversity: “H. T. Chang [Ben Fee] (Chinese Labor Group); Harrison George (TUEL); Alice Park (Housewives’ League, Palo Alto); Austin Lewis (S. F. Attorney)[;] H. Haksori [Hakomori] (Japanese W.A. [Workers Association], Los Angeles);51 K. Gardos (Communist Party, USA); J. Villareal (Mexican Labor Group)[;] Ben. Falcon (Philippine Legion of Labor)[;] J. Westgreen (Seamen’s Union).” After a brief recess, speeches followed.52 These included University of Southern California student “Ming Hua Wei, representing the Chinese Labor group” and whose transfer from the CCP to the CPUSA had been approved in 1928,53 Fee, Falcon, Villareal, the “colored worker” Davidson who “greeted the Conference in the name of the Negro workers,” and Gardos who declared that “all sincere opponents of imperialist war must unite in the AAAIL, even if they disagree on other questions.” Falcon pointed out that this gathering was most notable because it was “the first Conference which he attended, where white workers speak against racial discrimination and where there is a unity between all colors and races in fighting capitalism, the common enemy.”54

At the end of June, instructions were given for “Building [of] AAAIL Branches in Localities Where None Exist.” Specifically, the “backbone of the organization must be the affiliated organizations and nationality branches.” The former should include “trade unions and other labor organizations, political organizations, liberal groups, anti-militarist societies, etc.,” and the latter, “Chinese, Filipino, Latin American.”55 Meanwhile, Chinese activists redoubled their energies in seeking to organize Chinese workers in their own communities.
“Lead Up the General Life of the Chinese Masses in America”

In late 1927, left-wing Chinese activists began to pay greater attention to the struggles of workers in Chinese communities within the United States. The shift, as Lai points out, was especially important because “it marked the reorientation towards the labor movement of many in the Chinatown left who had outgrown their student careers.” For instance, before former university student Xu (alias Huafa) left for the East Coast in late spring 1928, Party members Li Gan and Xu advised Xavier Dea and his classmates to reorganize Sanminzhuyi Yanjiushe (Society for the Study of the Three Principles of the People) into the Gongyu Quluobu (Kung Yu Club [After working hours club]). Along with Dea, who became a leader in the Club, the roughly dozen active members included other former SFCSA activists as well as a number of workers from Chinatown. Then, in early 1928, in a further effort to reach out to Chinatown’s workers, the club again transformed itself, this time into the Huaren Gongrenhui (Chinese Workers’ Club).

In spite of the change in orientation, the group was unable to remove itself from intraparty politics. In a short time, it split into both a pro-KMT faction that called itself Huaqiao Gonghui (Overseas Chinese Club) and focused on providing job placement and a left-wing faction that reclaimed the name of Kung Yu Club and continued to put its energies into working with the American labor movement. However, once reformed, both the original Kung Yu Club in San Francisco and a branch that formed in Walnut Grove, California (also called the Kung Yu Club), sought to take part in and initiate labor organizing drives among Chinese workers in the area. The club in San Francisco tried to organize Chinatown restaurant workers. Lai wrote, “This attempt failed when the organizers made demands so out of line with Chinatown realities that few workers found them credible.”

The Chinese activists’ labor organizing at the local level was by no means limited to actions taken by this single group. In his report to the District Convention in January 1929, Fee enumerated the several labor groups formed and other labor-oriented initiatives in which they had participated. In this regard, Fee played a leading role not only at the local level in San Francisco’s Chinatown but also at the district and national levels among the non-Chinese Party leadership. Although he was a YCL rather than Party member, he often represented the Chinese Fraction and “Chinese workers” before or on Party committees because he was fluent in English and Chinese. For instance, at the meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of TUEL, held in February 1929 in New York City, Fee spoke before the group on “the activities of the Chinese Fraction among the Chinese workers in California.” At the district level, “Benjamin Fee (Chinese)” was among those elected “for the incoming new District Executive Committee” along with “Dea Wood” as an alternate.
One arena in which the Chinese Fraction engaged in activism at the local scale and in which Fee was a leader was the field of “YOUTH WORK.” Fee summarized the activities of the YWL Unit #7 (comprised of the Chinese Student Alliance in U.S.A. and Chinese Youth in S. F.), calling attention to its success in “capturing the Students Alliance.” Although Fee’s report did not indicate a special interest in labor issues on the part of left-wing Chinese students and youth, the report by YWL representative Minnie Carson revealed that “in S. F. the comrades refused to do industrial work . . . and gave an excuse that the work is not important because we have no proletarian workers in that nucleus.” In contrast, the young Chinese activists proved a striking and ironic exception to the rule; “the Chinatown nucleus is the only active nucleus in industrial work. They organized a club, laundry work and industrial work." Unlike the Party as a whole, these activists had arrived at least in practice at a more flexible understanding of what constituted “industrial” work within the immigrant economy.

This was not the only instance in which Chinese youth stood out in terms of dedication to the movement. In regard to election work, Carson reported, “When the comrades were called upon to distribute leaflets, only the Chinese comrades reported for this work,” even though at this time few “Chinese comrades” were eligible to vote. Finally, they were among the most outspoken on issues of discrimination. For instance, following the formation of a “University fraction in Berkeley,” the group discussed the “segregation question of Berkeley.” Members pointed out that the university “tried to keep the Orientals, Negroes and Mexicans, students from the University campus and around the schools.” Carson added, “Immediately all the Orientals called a mass meeting” that was attended by a League representative who “presented a policy which they were to follow.”

Less than a month later, at the Second National Conference the bureau issued a fuller statement, “Work Among the Masses,” which articulated the larger set of beliefs that underlay the Chinese activists’ efforts to organize Chinese workers in their local communities. As Communists dedicated to the class struggle as well as the struggle against all forms of imperialism with the ultimate goal of bringing about the “Proletarian World Revolution,” they placed their activism at the local level within this larger framework of thought: “To work among the masses is the basic task of the Fraction. Our line of work is to educate the Chinese workers in America in their class struggle, to arouse their class consciousness, to organise them into real working class organisations, to work within the already established workers’ associations in order to win them over, and to bring them together with the workers of other nationalities in America to fight against American Imperialism.” Impossibly ambitious as such a declaration appeared to be, it was immediately followed by a remarkably frank admission of failure: “But we must admit that not much satisfactory result has been brought about.”
The report cast a critical eye at what had been done thus far. The number of members had increased from eighteen in September 1927 to thirty-three in February 1929, although nine had "left U.S. for Europe" en route to Moscow between September 1927 and August 1928 and six had been expelled between the latter date and February 1929.63 There remained many weaknesses in the Fraction's work.

We have published a labor monthly called Kon [phonetically Kong] Yu, Which is the first and the only labor Chinese publication in America. It was not very well edited [sic] and its circulation is still not very extensive. We have organised several labor associations such as the Kong [sic] Yu Club, in Walnut Grove, the Chinese Workers Association in California, the Kong [sic] Yu Club in San Francisco, the Chinese Workers' Alliance in New York, the Chinese section fo [sic] the International Labor Defense in Philadelphia, etc. Chiefly due to inexperience on our part, we have not been able to develop these organisation [sic] into the desired shape. The present situation is that one has been disintegrated (N.Y.). One has fallen in the hands on the right wing (Calif.) one is not well controlled and two (San Francisco and Philadelphia) are without larger membership.64

The "comrades" also remained active "within the old organisations like the Seamen's Clubs in Phia. [sic] and N.Y. and the Unionist Guild in San Francisco," had "approached" "women workers in San Francisco" and "distributed leaflets among the Chinese workers telling them not to break the strike and to give full support" to the striking "Pullman Negro Porters." Furthermore, they had "carried on a campaign to aid the Chinese Trade Unions" and attempted "to make connection with the Chinese Seamen working on the foreign ships along the West Coast." Unfortunately, "due to strict vigilance of the ship owners and them [sic] immigration officers [sic]," the latter effort had "not been yet successful." Given the relatively small number of activists in the various cities, the record was dizzying in scope and level of activity. However, none of the above appeared to merit special praise, which was reserved for a single action that "must be recorded as a great step forward in our work among the Chinese Masses"—the recent strike of Chinese laundrymen and women in which "our comrades there were able to some extent to direct the movement, and became connected with the strikers."65

The laudatory comments were well deserved as the action was significant on a number of counts. First, the very fact that the strike had occurred among Chinese laundry workers, who were organized into the Sai Fook Tong (Chinese Laundry Workers Union) in which "about 15 percent were women workers" was noteworthy.66 Second, the workers had won all their demands "except pay for time lost" as a result of their weeklong strike beginning at "noon Monday January 28th," 1929. These included twin demands: "All workers, men and women,
Throughout the process of organizing the walkout, the union followed democratic procedures. Third, the action involved both the Party’s “Chinese Units, League and Party,” and non-Chinese Party organizers. Among the Chinese activists, “Billy” played the key role in his capacity as representative of the Kung Yu Club along with Dea as representative of the ACWP; the two served with Manus on the Advisory Committee to the Strike Committee. Also active was Fee; among non-Chinese Party activists Manus and Ellen were the lead organizers, and Levin also provided some assistance and guidance. Fourth, the strike was significant in terms of the breadth of support it received. Notably, “the Japanese Workers Club (our own organization) issued leaflets in Japanese which were translated into Chinese also. [sic] calling upon the Japanese workers to help the Chinese workers and not to act as scabs, urging them to place their solidarity before the Chinese strikers.” In addition, the ILD offered to place “the services of the ILD at the disposal of the strikers . . . [who] will take over the defense in case of any persecution.” Within the Chinese community, support came from the Kung Yu Club, the Chinese Labor Alliance, ACWP, the Union Guild, “some Chinese papers,” and both YWL and Party members. Given such broad support, it is surprising to learn that news of the strike did not spread very far among the non-Chinese party rank-and-file. Because of this, DEC member Joe Modotti resolved, “As a member of the Buro, hereafter I will make a point of arranging frequent meetings with the Chinese comrades for the purpose of mutual help and work.” But the rank-and-file members and party organizers were, in fact, never told about events in the Chinese community.

The strike was a landmark; it was the first time a Chinese organization was invited to attend a meeting of the San Francisco Labor Council thanks to strenuous efforts on Billy’s part. Indeed, even the notoriously anti-Chinese Seamen’s Journal published an article that said: “This incident is of historic significance—first, because never before had a duly accredited delegate of organized Chinese workers appeared on the floor of San Francisco Labor Council; second, because the strike illustrates forcibly the terrible contrast in the working conditions of white and yellow.” Nonetheless, the journal saw no contradiction in broadcasting its harangue about the “threat” and “menace” of “Asiatics.”

Even with this recent victory so fresh in the minds of the assembled group, the national conference in February acknowledged many weaknesses in their work. After detailing problems at the local level, the report summarized “the principal causes of our defects.” Of the eight points, all but two centered on internal factors—problems of “language and dialect difficulties,” with “Cantonese working class comrades . . . not all participat[ing] actively in Party work,” “condemnation of masses, segregation from masses” and “lack of a clear analysis of the conditions of the Chinese community,” and “low ideological level” and “strong Kuomintang tradition prevailed still among the membership.” The two external causes were “poor relation with the Party. Lack of guidance [sic]
and assistance from the Party” and “tremendous financial difficulties.” This was not the first time that the Chinese Buro had called attention to the last two problems, which, from the perspective of the activists, were connected.74

The Chinese Party members had not avoided raising the twin subjects in their respective districts. The same report noted “our Philadelphia comrades complained that they had contact with the D.O. only when the District wants money.” And in January Fee called his district’s attention to the “serious inattention of the Party.” Of particular concern was the situation in Chicago where “the DO there did not know there was a Chinese Buro even.” On the financial question, the report listed a string of instances in which the CEC had not come through with aid: “The cases [sic] of subsidiary to the publication of the Chinese ‘Communist’ in the end of 1927, of sending comrades abroad [to study in Moscow before going to China] in the Summer of 1928, of subsidiary of the ‘Communist’ and delegate to the National Conference of the Fraction this year are some examples.”75

Although the leading members of the Chinese Buro for the most part framed the issue as a problem, equally apparent from their remarks was the activists’ unusual degree of independence relative to the Party leadership. For instance, in reviewing the “Organizational [sic] Problems of the Fraction,” the February 1929 report noted: “With the exception of San Francisco the Chinese Units do not have organizational contact with the District. They work independently and are quided [sic] only by the National Buro.” The report astutely pointed out, “Lack of attention on the part of District was the cause of the independent character of the Chinese Unit in the Districts [sic].” From the perspective of at least one Party leader such behavior should serve as a model for others. At the District Convention in January Levin twice singled out the Chinese and Filipino members for praise: “We must all understand Communist initiative better; the Chinese report and San Juan report gave an example of real initiative. The Chinese and Filipinos speak various dialects and cannot understand each other and have accomplished a great deal.”76

It did not follow, however, that the Party leadership as a whole welcomed such independence. In July 1929, the national leadership leveled severe criticism at the Chinese immigrant Communists for convening a national conference.77 Five months after the gathering, then Secretary of the Buro Li relayed the new directives issued by P. Smith, secretary of the “recently established” CEC of the Language Department: “the Chinese Buro is an agent of the CEC and does not represent the Chinese party members as a national group it follows that the Chinese Party members can hold no national conference hereafter, neither can they creat [sic] the Buro . . . that all members of the Buro must reside in New York; that the Chinese Buro is now under the jurisdiction of the Department.” According to Comrade Smith, “the Buro had to be reorganized.”78 Once again the party leadership was refusing to acknowledge the special position of Chinese immigrants within the American nation. As “aliens ineligible
to citizenship," they were not at liberty to shed their identity as a “national group” and become assimilated into the larger society. Moreover, the group could not operate directly under the jurisdiction of the Party’s Language Department because no members of the Language Department knew Chinese, and few Chinese activists knew English.

The activists themselves had already reorganized the bureau with its transfer from San Francisco to New York shortly after the National Conference in February. It consisted of Li as secretary, Xu as acting secretary, He Zhifen (Chee Fun Ho,79 alias Hazen), and two others as central committee members (Fee was possibly involved because he was named “industrial organizer of the Buro”), and Xavier Dea and Zhang Bao as alternates.80 In October the Language Department “appointed to the Buro: Li (student), Liu (worker), Lo (worker), Mo (worker) and Chi (student). Comrade Li was appointed secretary.”82 At the “first meeting of the new Chinese National Buro,” held on October 25, 1929, a number of decisions were made, including initiating the process of reevaluation that culminated by the end of that year in ACWP’s reorganization as the AACAI. In addition, the Buro “request[ed] the Party to help set up an indepent [sic] printing press in N. Y..” and it “decided that the Chinese ‘COMMUNIST’ [Kungchang] shall be still published twice a month.”83

Finally, Li “reported publication of a special pamphlet ‘The Chinese in America and our Tasks.’” Even as he reminded the group of “the organizational mistake and also factional opportunist formulations,” for which they had been reprimanded by Comrade Smith, Li “emphasized the usefulness of the parts dealing with the Chinese community.” The aim in producing such a publication was “to draw critism [sic] and suggestions from Chinese comrades so that it will be a basis for a better and more correct program of action among the Chinese.” This comment did not necessarily imply that either Li or the other leading members of the bureau were unwilling to follow specific Party directives or the larger Party line, though on at least one occasion they cautioned against accepting CI directives “simply as a matter of discipline.” Rather, “the correct path” should be one that has been “verified by the experiences” of the American Party and “especially of the Chinese branch.”84 Li was fully cognizant of the fact that the bureau must look not to the party leadership but to their fellow activists for recommendations regarding a “more correct program of action among the Chinese.”85

About two months later, as part of the nationwide “recruiting campaign,” which aimed to move the Party in the direction of “becoming the mass political Party of the working class of the United States,” Li prepared an “Instruction of the Chinese Buro.” Following party procedure, Li submitted “an excerpt from the instruction in Chinese” to the CC of the Language Department.” The first “two sections” covered only “essential points,” “also published in the Language [Department’s] paper, the ‘Communist.’” The “third section,” however, was not only “a direct translation from the Chinese version” but also “was omitted
In the third section, before listing the “General Points of the Campaign” Li outlined the larger context. Four “conditions” must be emphasized: one, the current “radicalization of the American workers does not exclude the Chinese”; two, the “rising of the new revolutionary wave in China” coupled with the “revolutionary influence” of “the heroic struggle of the American workers” over “the Chinese workers”; three, the “Reorganization of the Chinese Fractions” meant that the Chinese party members now “join the regular Party units . . . and understand more about the line, tactics, and work of the Party as a whole”; and, last, the “Secret Character of the work of the Chinese Comrades” continues. Of the four, the last “condition” was the one “which differentiates the method for the recruiting Drive of the Chinese Fractions to some extent from that of the Party.” In other words, “we must successfully apply the general line of the Party to the specific conditions under which we work.” In particular, “unlike the Party that can publicly appeal for membership, we can recruiting [sic] new members mostly from those we have organized in our fraternal organizations where the Chinese work[es] [sic] can be testified [sic] and trained before joining the Party.” Thus, once again, Chinese immigrant Communists were articulating the delicate and contradictory nature of the position they occupied. Even as they acquiesced in party protocol and “join[ed] the regular units,” they were compelled to point out that the “specific conditions under which we work” necessitated that the fourth “condition” override the third and that they be allowed to continue to work separately within their own immigrant communities.

Isolation and the need for secrecy were not the only dilemmas that left-wing Chinese activists confronted at that time. In Philadelphia and New York, the far more pressing problems were unemployment, underemployment, and the resulting poverty. Li reported at the end of May 1929, “During the past two months comrades in Philadelphia and New York most of them lose jobs.” Thus, it was “absolutely impossible for the Buro to tax the membership.” Similarly, “reports from comrades in Philadelphia” indicated that the activists there were “really in a difficult situation”: “The unemployed workers couldn’t find jobs in a short time, thus their livings are not supported . . . Therefore temporary relief measures have to be taken. In Philadelphia, only workers in laundry and restaurants could get support for their livings (currently workers are mostly in laundry, this is mainly due to the small capitals they have and also to the competition from the farmers). On the one hand, they can earn support for their livings; on the other hand, all the party’s activities are still maintained.”

In response to these reports, the National Buro emphasized that relief measures were only “temporary and subject to change” and further that “these methods are only applied to those who really have problems in finding
FIGURES 7A AND 7B Minutes of seventh meeting of the Chinese Buro, CPUSA, April 5, 1929, with agenda at top of first of two pages, followed by discussion of items alongside numbered headings. In attendance were: Li as Secretary, Xu as Acting Secretary, James Mo, and Xavier Dea.
new jobs. The fewer the participants and the shorter the time, the better." Moreover, recipients of this assistance were reminded that they “should keep looking for jobs so that the supply could be saved for others once they get jobs.” On a more positive note, the bureau mentioned that “some comrades in New York recently opened a restaurant” and recommended that the National Bureau “should summarize the experiences and lessons,” presumably so that they might serve as a model for the comrades in Philadelphia.89

With the onset of the Great Depression, the situation became more dire. Zhang recalled that just as “a large number of people were unemployed,” so the “Chinese people there faced the same situation.” During 1931–1932 the activists reported “instability in work,” and in Boston there was “fear for work.” By late August 1932, Zhang reported that the Chinese Bureau in New York was “in such bad financial condition that it can hardly buy stamps and envelops [sic],” not through any fault of their own but because “most of the Chinese comrades are unemployed.” In the past individual members of the bureau had spent money “from their pockets” on office expenses and to “send comrades to Moscow,” but this was no longer an option. Even the most privileged members, namely, the students, could no longer keep the bureau afloat because in late August 1929, when news of their “revolutionary activities” reached China, Quinghua University had cut off its financial support for Xu, Chi, and several other left-wing students.90 To make ends meet, Xu “sold newspapers on the street, polished shoes for pedestrians, and waited at tables in restaurants.”91

Another problem that continued to haunt the activists wherever they were located were the multiple threats posed by immigration authorities, the KMT right-wing, and local police who could not only harass but also threaten the foreign-born with deportation. For instance, in 1929, “the San Francisco police, perhaps egged on by the KMT right-wing, raided the headquarters of the San Francisco Chinese Students club and closed it for alleged communist activities.”92

Thus, at the end of the 1920s, the Chinese immigrant Communists had clearly and remarkably consolidated their apparatus, with the establishment of a national bureau and local branches in New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and Madison, and regular publication in Chinese of not only Kungchang, Xianfeng Zhoukan, Kung Yu (Gong Yu—The Worker), and the Chinese Students’ Monthly (English) but also of the “Marine Workers,” “Restaurant Workers,” “Laundry Workers,” and “Agricultural Workers.” In addition, the Chinese Bureau directed a number of mass organizations, including the AACAI, a Chinese Worker Club in San Francisco, Chinese Branches of the ILD in Philadelphia, San Francisco, and New York, and a Chinese Section of the TUUL union, the Food Workers Industrial Union (FWIU) in New York.94 It had fractions within the Chinese Seamen’s Club in Philadelphia, the Chinese Unionist Guild, the Chinese Workers Alliance in Chicago, and the Chinese Students'
Alliance in the United States. Yet, the activists worked within a context in which successes were highly vulnerable to setbacks, if not dissolution of the organizations altogether.95

**Taking “A Great Step Forward of the Communist Movement Among Chinese Masses in America”**

On April 3, 1930, the first issue of the AACAI's Chinese-language newspaper *Xianfeng Bao* (Chinese Vanguard Weekly) appeared. Such an event was no small feat. Just to be able to launch the publication, the bureau ran up $1900 in expenses. In addition, a “monthly deficit of $200.00 for six months” was projected.96 In its former incarnation as *Xianfeng Zhoukan*, the mimeographed paper had served as the organ of the ACWP. By contrast, as stated in the “Special Resolution of the Chinese Buro, C.C.,” this new “printed weekly” was to “carry strictly a Party line, and develop wider connections preparing the ground for an official Party organ. For the time being,” however, it would be “a Party organ without a label.”97

This description of the newspaper suggested the subtle change of orientation taking place among the leading Chinese immigrant Communists at the beginning of the 1930s. First, “overt activities in support of the Chinese Revolution had ebbed among the Chinese in America. The Kuomintang right, in collaboration with the police and supported by the conservative merchants, gained control in the community.”98 However, as loyal Communists who adhered to and therefore viewed events through the lens of Third Period doctrine, this was a time of crisis and revolutionary possibility. In “the present period of crisis of post-war capitalism” Chinese workers “threw overboard their utopian dreams of ‘getting rich’ and began to be more class-conscious.” Therefore, “our Party must take advantages of the growing favorable situation to educate and organise the Chinese masses and lead them closer to the general life and struggle of the American working class.” Especially significant was not simply issuing this directive; rather, the activists suggested a need to showcase local work over efforts to “also rally them [the Chinese masses] to the support of the revolutionary struggles in China.”99

At the same time, in a move that seemed to work at crosspurposes to the above directive, the members of the CC expressed a strong desire to strengthen relations with the Chinese in China and to build close ties with the CCP. For instance, in discussing why such “a mass agitation organ is IMPERATIVE,” they called attention to the “strong reactionary propaganda among the tremendous Chinese population, (about 15 Chinese dailies alone in America)” and made the following additional points: “Furthermore, the coming weekly is not only the revolutionary organ of one million Chinese in this continent, but is also the organ of the nearly eight million Chinese outside China . . . It is needless to mention the importance of this Paper to the C. P. of China, because . . . we
have set up a printing shop which will supply partially propaganda materials to the latter in time of need.”

The Chinese immigrant Communists obviously understood their activism was bound up with not only the Communist movement in China but also the international cause: they identified with and pledged commitment to speak on behalf of the millions of “Chinese outside China.” Throughout the text of the Special Resolution, the CC made clear that the bureau had in no way abandoned or even moderated its revolutionary beliefs and commitments. In deciding “to enlarge the ‘Chinese Vanguard,’” the bureau had received “the approval of the Party, the Chinese Delegation at Moscow and also the Eastern Department of the Comintern.” As for the CPUSA’s approval, the secretary of the Language Department of the Central Committee endorsed the Chinese Bureau’s joint proposals “to organize a wide campaign in connection with the Soviet Congress in China, May 30th,” and “to have greetings sent through the Chinese Vanguard weekly to China.” The question of “enlist[ing] support to the Chinese revolution . . . concern[ed] not only the Chinese Bureau of our Party but the whole Party.”

There were, in fact, several contradictory forces at work. The bureau was beginning to grapple more seriously with the problem of “segregation from [the] masses” and forced to work within an increasingly dangerous and inhospitable environment. According to the Third Period doctrine, however, Communists were entering a period of sharpening contradictions and “the increasing revolutionary activities of workers and peasants in Americas greatly influenced the Chinese masses here.” As members of a national section of the Comintern, it was the duty of the Chinese immigrant Communists to act as the vanguard of such a revolutionary upsurge. By emphasizing this duty, ideological, cultural, and personal connections tied the Chinese activists in America to Chinese revolutionaries in China, in Moscow, and elsewhere in the world and the leadership of the Eastern Department of the Comintern. The American Party firmly supported the Chinese Bureau’s public alignment with the Chinese revolutionary movement and its efforts to direct attention to anti-imperialist struggles overseas. As spelled out in the minutes of a joint meeting of the Chinese Buro and the Agit-Prop and Language Departments, the larger aims of the campaign “should be the BEGINNING of a REAL, CONTINUOUS MASS CAMPAIGN to support the Chinese and Latin-American masses on the PART OF THE U.S. WORKERS,” and the “BUILDING-UP of the ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE.”

During the first two years of the 1930s, the National Chinese Buro and its branches both grew and stagnated. In June and July 1930, 72 party members out of 285 participants in “Org. controlled by the Party,” but only 2 party members out of 105 participants in “Org. influenced by the Party.” In February 1929, only thirty-three party members were recorded; thus, in sixteen months the nationwide membership had increased by at least 39 members.
Although such an increase might appear small, it must always be seen against the backdrop of the severe penalties incurred by party members whose identities local KMT leaders or immigration authorities discovered. Under these circumstances, perhaps as significant a measure as formal membership in the Party was the material assistance given to activities organized by the National Buro, its branches, and the mass organizations it directed. For example, the bureau received a “Collection among Chinese” totaling $1,000 as “INCOME” for launching Xianfeng Bao.103

Local branches of the bureau enjoyed some success in the party-led unemployed movement. In January 1931, under the leadership of Dea the Kung Yu Club in San Francisco formed a San Francisco Chinese Unemployed Alliance as a branch of the larger party-led Unemployed Council in San Francisco. It mobilized “several hundred unemployed Chinese in Chinatown to march on the Chinese Six Companies (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, CCBA) to demand immediate relief.” “Later many of these participants also joined a massive demonstration of the unemployed in San Francisco’s business district.” As Lai comments, “this marked one of the earliest instances of American Chinese taking part in such an event outside Chinatown.”104 This initiative was part of a broad effort to expand its base in the Chinese community. “Since 1930, the Seamen group, the unemployed [sic] alliance, the needle trades group had been formed.” Shortly after the above demonstrations the Kung Yu Club established the Huagong Zhongxin (Chinese Workers Club) to assist Chinese workers looking for work as well as to rally them in support of the Chinese Revolution.105 Perhaps the most striking instance of success occurred among the highly mobile in the maritime field, when sometime in the spring of 1932 almost the entire membership of the KMT-controlled club joined the MWIU in Philadelphia and the club was dissolved.106

Furthermore, the bureau accomplished a great deal in its work among youth. For instance, in 1931 it was noted, “In San Francisco, the Chinese Buro is making progress in youth work and are now organizing sports clubs etc.” Also, the Buro controlled the youth organization Mass Voice whose membership included thirty-five YCL members. While the bureau could boast about forming the Resonance Association, “an organization of Chinese youth for the struggle against imperialism” based in San Francisco, and the reappearance of Resonance, a four-page printed monthly edited by Fee, circulation of the publication was “not wide and subscription is small.” Plus, the association only had “a membership of fifteen.”107 More fledgling were the efforts in women’s work. The National Conference in February 1929 declared that “the recruiting of women members into the Party and adequate attention of the Party on this work are quite urgent.” Yet, two years later, the bureau was said to be moving in a positive direction only because it had “committees for women’s work in district Bureaus for work among women workers.” As for the press, success was moderate. Party papers issued included Xianfeng Bao, Kung Yu, and The Mass
Voice with a circulation in February 1931 of 1500, 500 and 500 respectively, and an overall “percentage growth in last year” of 15 percent.\textsuperscript{108}

However, signs of stagnation were also evident. In 1930 there were “only the Anti-imperialist Alliance and the Resonance Association and the I.L.D. Chinese Branches numbered about 250.” When considering bureau publications, “in 1930 only the Chinese Vanguard was published with an actual circulation of about 500–600, as compared with the present [1933] of 900.”\textsuperscript{109} Finally, at a meeting in January of the District 13 (San Francisco) Language Buro “with the Secretaries of the Language fractions,” Dea, “reporting for Chinese fraction,” presented a fairly bleak picture of local activism. There were only “10 Party members” and an “ILD branch with 24 members, Party members included. [The] Alliance for support of Chinese Revolution [was] not functioning. Chinese Labor League is going to issue two bulletins, one to the Food Workers and the other to the Needle Trade Workers. Anti-Imperialist League not functioning.”\textsuperscript{110} The bureau was obviously encountering difficulty in fulfilling its aims of “educat[ing] and organiz[ing] the Chinese masses” in America during the early 1930s.

Also, when organizing Chinese workers who labored within the United States, advances were less certain. There were no district bureaus in either Detroit or Chicago. More important, the activists could not make any headway in gaining influence over Chinese local organizations. For that reason, it is difficult to gauge what “success” meant when party members claimed to have “succeeded in penetrating among the reactionary students [sic] meetings in Columbia, etc.” and had formed a fraction in the recently established “A Chinese Students Culb [sic] for the Study of Socialism.”\textsuperscript{111}

Other clear instances of stagnation include a “decline in activities of the [Unemployed] Council due to the lack of coordination of work among the comrades in San Francisco.” It would be another year before activists succeeded in forming the Chinese Unemployed Alliance of Greater New York. More troubling still was the “situation in the F.W.I.U. in New York” in 1932, which apparently was “in such a bad situation that many Chinese workers who belong to the Union get disgusted with repeated blunders of the union leaders.” As a result, it was “hard for the Chinese comrades to work among the Chinese workers in the union and hard to bring workers into the union.”\textsuperscript{112}

As of February 1931 out of a nationwide total of “33” functioning fractions only a “very small number” existed “in organizations controlled by our class enemies”; and the Buro also answered “No” to the question whether it could “send organizer on tour to organize the campaign for building our mutual aid organizations.” Furthermore, growth was slow and uneven within organizations “controlled” by the comrades, and they did not necessarily reflect greater influence on the Buro’s part. For example, in its responses to another Language Department questionnaire dated November 23, 1932, the Buro wrote
that membership in AACAI, The Resonance Association, the ILD Branches, and
the Seamen’s Club was “growing though slowly”; furthermore, “there is great
fluctuation due to lack of systematic work and correct approach,” and any
apparent growth was “mainly due to anti-Japanese sentiment and suffering
from mass unemployment.”

Finally, increased harassment resulted in arrests and deportations. In late
1930, Secretary of the Buro Li was arrested and threatened with immediate
deporation “for his political belief and activity.” In spite of defense efforts
undertaken by both the bureau and the ILD National Office in New York (after
some delay), as well as a “flood of protests,” including those from American
philosopher and educator John Dewey who knew Li as a “regular student at
Columbia U.,” Li was “ordered deported to China.” After further negotiations,
immigration officials permitted him to be deported to the USSR.

Around this same time on the other coast, Xavier Dea and University of
Southern California graduate student Wei Minghua were subjected to similar
treatment. Recalling the sequence of events that followed Dea’s arrest, Zhang
Bao related that Dea “surrendered to the immigration office on May 14th, 1931
upon the information of his activities by the Kuomintang and imperialist
agents in S.F.” Dea, he continued “was in jail since then until he was granted
voluntary departure, started for the Soviet Union from S.F. on May 6th, 1932.”
The process leading up to his departure was anything but easy. Dea was “suf-
fering indescribable turture [sic] and discrimation [sic]” on Angel Island. That
fall, Wei was arrested on November 16, 1931, in Los Angeles at an ILD member-
ship meeting “when anti-war leaflets were found on his car by members of the
‘Red Squad.’” He, too, was granted permission to “depart voluntarily” to the
Soviet Union and left on May 22, 1932.

On the East Coast, sometime in August 1932 Zhang himself became the
target of sustained harassment. He was forced to resign from his position as
head of the bureau and seemingly disappeared. The bureau apparently did
not know that in late August the party leadership helped Zhang escape to the
Soviet Union, where he received permission to transfer his membership from
the CPUSA to the CPSU. On September 1, the bureau learned most rudely
that “the secret service agents are still looking for J. M. [James Mo],” when the
agents appeared on “the 2nd floor of the Worker Center at a lecture conducted
by the Anti Imperialist League” and “question[ed] a non-party comrade,”
whom they had “mistaken” for Zhang.

Not surprisingly, the Buro was plunged into a crisis. Newly appointed Sec-
retary of the Buro Henry Hahn explained: “Since Comrade Mo’s affair the work
of the Buro had been carried on in an unorganized manner and now especially
the situation becomes acute. There is no fund for postage and other material,
and as Comrade Hahn is recalled from Philadelphia to take the place of Com-
rade Mo as secretary, he has since stayed at Mo’s place. Due to Mo’s departure
the place is to be given up. The question rises as to a suitable place for the
documents and for work, because the available places are open to outside workers.” Even as he reassured party leader Earl Browder that all this was “not to say that we ask the secretariat to look for a place or to solve this [sic] small difficulties [sic] for us,” Hahn nonetheless closed his postscript with the following recommendation: “In view of the fact that white terror is intensified, we suggest that the secretariat instruct the A.I.L. to release the Chinese comrades from open.” (The end of the sentence is cut off by the margin of the page but presumably Hahn was referring to “open” meetings of the Anti-Imperialist League.) Although not mentioned by Hahn, we know from another source that Hahn’s own situation may have been far less secure than his reassurances might lead one to believe. At an earlier meeting of the Chinese Buro where Hahn was approved as the new secretary of the Buro, a motion was adopted “to take up with the Secretariat about finding for Hahn some sort of paying position in sympathetic or other organizations so as to make Hahn’s stay in New York possible . . . because of Hahn’s health.”

In spite of the seeming thoroughness and candor of the many reports filed by the activists, one issue was not discussed—namely, the continuing separation between the members of the bureau and the so-called Chinese masses in American communities. This issue came to the fore following the reorganization of the Chinese National Bureau in October 1929. In July 1931, in a letter addressed to Hahn, Chow En Len, who had recently “resigned from the post of secretary of the New York Branch,” along with fellow activists Wong Hwin and Lee Chen delivered harsh criticism of the “situation of the Alliance of the Chinese Anti-Imperialists.” Largely written in the first person, and “in the tone and by the hand of Chow,” the letter declared:

Since the organization og [sic] of the Alliance, there has not [been] any progress during the past several years. In N.Y.C., the number of members has not increased. Especially at the present time, the conditions are partially dead, and constitute [sic] a condition of backwardness . . . Some comrades told me that the backwardness of the Alliance was due to the leading comrades in the top, who are not trying their utmost for thd [sic] work among the workers, who are not speaking for the workers. Some are just pretend [sic] to be revolutionary. Some have the nervous disease about female sex, to become outstanding in the name of the Party. Their attitude of an [sic] rotten egg has been now finally discovered by the workers in the fraction. Afterwards we dont [sic] have to believe in what they say.

While acknowledging poor revolutionary credentials—“my experiences and past records in the revolutionary movement are shallow and weak”—Chow nonetheless reminded Hahn that he had been a member of “the Alliance for about one year, and have been trained by the Party in the work I should do.” In addition, he had “observed [for] several months.”
The letter writers exhorted: “Since they have done this [sic] rotten things and were discovered by us, we must put all our forces to sweep them completely . . . Comrade Han [sic]: Wake up quickly! Prepare for the bright future that is to come! Forward with the class struggle to accomplish the tasks unfinished by our forerunners.” In a postscript they demanded: “The Chinese Fraction under the monopoly of a few students is going from bad to worse. We can not [sic] tolerate any longer. We decide to demand its complete reorganisation [sic] at the next Fraction meeting. If our demand is not passed, then we may not appeal. We will organise another organisation as a counter organisation to oppose it . . . Without the abolishion [sic] of these several students, there can be no development in the work among the Chinese masses. This I have said long ago.” The letter clearly revealed not only the inability of the Chinese immigrant Communists to continue pursuing older strategies but also the emergence of heightened criticism of the divide between them and ordinary working people in Chinese communities in America.

The Chinese National Bureau responded swiftly to the criticism, though its response was surprisingly mild and included no demands for punishment. Rather, having arrived at the conclusion that “these several comrades were instigated by talks and conversations which brought about the misunderstanding and misconception about the Bureau,” the bureau sent letters to “each of the three comrades,” by calling attention to not so much the substance of the criticism but rather to the tone and mode in which it had been delivered. As party members, they should “exercise real Bolshvic [sic] spirit.” In addition, they must heed the following rule: “Inner Party disputes should not be broadcast to nonparty members and you should not attack [sic] our own auxiliary organisations among the non-Party masses”; instead, “you must send in your concrete criticisms and suggestions, you must follow the line of the party, base on the organisational tightness of the Party, observe the iron discipline of the Party and send in your ruthless criticisms!”

Perhaps the bureau’s apparent leniency was owing at least in part to the fact that the “three comrades” touched upon a matter that the Bureau had already acknowledged as a problem—the predominance of “intellectuals” and “students” over “workers,” and the “attitude” of the former toward the “Chinese masses in Chinatown.”

The American Defense of the Chinese People

On January 18, 1933, a “meeting of a group of comrades to form the organization for support of the Chinese Revolution” was held at the Japanese Workers Club. Among those present were “J. Loeb, Trebst, Huafa [Xu] and Hahn.” Having met previously and received “proposals made by the Chinese Buro,” the group chose a name for the organization, “Friends of the Chinese People,” determined the composition of the committee, and wrote an “Outline for
The program mainly sought to support the Chinese people’s “resistance [sic] to Japanese invasion” and their “struggle for national liberation in all its phases.” To this end, the organization was mandated “to cooperate with all organisations which have similar ends in view toward oppressed peoples.” Equally important, the committee included leading Chinese immigrant Communists Xu, Chi, and Hahn, non-Chinese party leaders in District 2 such as Anthony Bimba and Moissaye J. Olgin, and prominent nonparty figures such as the intellectual Philip J. Jaffe (who was the third cousin of Chi’s wife, Harriet Levine), and “John Dewey, Stokofsky, Elmer Rice, George Counts, Harry F. Ward, Scott Nearing, [and] Lewis Gannes.” Also, to be approached were “Trade Unions and Literary organizations.”

The Chinese activists, under Xu’s initiative, began to grapple more seriously with the problem of “separation from the masses.” Through his efforts to make contact with Chinese workers in New York’s Chinatown, Xu had “become aware of the overemphasis” by the Chinese Bureau and the AACAI on the political situation in China and on revolutionary movements elsewhere overseas, which resulted in the “neglect of the real sufferings and problems in the daily lives” of these workers. In an article published in the February 15, 1933, issue of Xianfeng Bao, he offered a “candid self-criticism” of the group and called attention to both their contemptuous attitude and “their overzealous concern for abstract concepts and theory.” He asked rhetorically, “if we overlook their problems, and if we cannot even understand the needs of the masses, how can we expect to attract the masses?”

The new organization “Friends of the Chinese People” should be a multi-pronged effort, to include use of the “Chinese Press”; the dissemination of literature among “American workers and toilers”; the mobilization of workers in the war and transportation industries to stop the shipment of arms to Japan and China; and grassroots organizing efforts among Chinese in America to build “self-aid organisations” and defend those “who are arrested for deportation.” In addition, the CC of the Bureau should enforce the following code of conduct: “To impress all comrades with the necessity of maintaining illegal work among the Chinese comrades. The comrades who are in mass organisations in hostile organizations, or who return to China, must not appear as Communists, but must present themselves as anti-Japanese, anti-imperialist, etc.” This last point was not simply a matter of individual behavior; rather, it concerned the central issue governing the change in orientation advocated by leading Chinese immigrant Communists in America.

The crux of the matter was spelled out in the final comments. Critics alleged that the publication “China Today” promoted “news about Soviet China” to the neglect of “the anti-Japanese, anti-imperialist struggle.” The proposed remedy changed direction: “This should be reversed so that the main emphasis must be placed on the anti-Japanese, anti-imperialist struggle, to appeal to the broadest sections of the Chinese People.” In fact, at the meeting of the
CC of the Chinese Buro held on January 20, 1933, two days after the meeting where the name and program of “Friends of the Chinese People” were chosen, those present had already articulated the shift: “Should make a turn in anti-Japanese imperialist work among the Chinese: liquidate the non-cooperation attitude of the past, penetrate into the masses by participating in the anti-Japanese collection drive, into aviation training corps, etc. . . . When we have not yet gain [sic] the confidence of the masses, there must not be any split with them, or any action taken which would lead to a split with the masses.”

By early April, in response to the CPUSA Central Committee’s suggestion to name the new organization “Friends of Revolutionary China,” “the initiative group of Comrades” decided, instead, to name it “AMERICAN DEFENSE of the CHINESE PEOPLE.” In a long letter, the group explained, unlike a “more revolutionary” name, such as “Friends of Revolutionary China,” the chosen name would facilitate broad-based work. “With this name, we can work on the widest possible front. The unorganized and undeveloped workers can be drawn in, as well as the petty bourgeois liberals, and many other elements.” In other words, the aim was not simply to “attract those who are already within the Red Orbit” but, rather, to “capitalize the large Anti-Japanese sentiment existing throughout the country.” On a tactical level, “Mass protests held under the auspices of the AMERICAN DEFENSE of the CHINESE PEOPLE will be more effective, and receive much more recognition by the Capitalist Press and official Washington, than if the same protests were made by an organization with a revolutionary name.”

Sandwiched between the above points were two statements that seemed to contradict the rest of the analysis: first, “our objectives, as expressed in our revolutionary program, and our directive forces will remain the same, irrespective of the name we adopt”; and second, “unorganized workers, Socialist Party members, Liberals and the petty bourgeoisie, must subscribe to our revolutionary program before joining the organization. This would be an essential condition for all prospective members, no matter which of the two names we may adopt.”

At that very moment, Xu was also pressing members of the Chinese Fraction to address the neglect of Chinese workers’ problems in America. It is unsurprising that the proposed change in orientation might produce conflict, but the impact of these changes on the attitude and policy concerning the activists’ work was less predictable.

In the responses to a questionnaire during the second half of 1933, the Chinese activists noted, “The total membership of all organisations now in round figure number 3,180,” an increase from “about 250” in 1930. However, “the chief characteristic then as now is the duplication [sic] in membership—one belongs to more than one organisation, especially [sic] party members.” A brief commentary on the “foremost tasks in the mass organisations” raised two problems: first, “the drive for new members drawing in new element as
instrument for liquidation of the sectarian tendencies of the party members”; and second, the “urgent need” for an “intensive drive to liquidate illiteracy both in the Chinese and the English languages.” There was growing acceptance of the necessity, though perhaps not agreement on the method, of addressing the problem of how to bridge the divide between committed party members and working people in Chinese communities to mobilize the masses in support of the bureau’s “revolutionary program.”

In the early 1930s the activists began to experience some success in mobilizing a broad constituency, including ordinary Chinese working people, Filipinos, Japanese, and other American workers and so-called liberal elements. The most promising fields were the “anti-Japanese invasion united front” and the related antiwar and antifascist struggles. For instance, an article on the front page of the January 30, 1933, issue of the *Western Worker* reported that “five hundred workers, including 150 Chinese and Filipinos marched through Chinatown today demanding the release of Huang Ping, member of the Executive Committee of the Anti Imperialist League, arrested in Peiping January 4 by the Kuomintang.” Barely a month later, the *Western Worker* flashed another headline: “2,500 AT JAPANESE, GERMAN CONSULATES OF S. F. PROTEST FASCIST TERROR AND WAR PREPARATIONS AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION.” This time “a parade in which Chinese, Japanese, Germany [sic], Filipino and American workers joined, went through Chinatown and other districts crowded with thousands of workers. Banners were carried in various languages making a most impressive parade.”

Thus, even as Chinese immigrant Communists moved toward embracing a policy that advocated cooperation “with all organizations which have similar ends in view,” they also sought ways to support the Chinese Revolution and sustain close ties with the CCP. For example, “at the beginning of the 1930s, the Chinese Bureau received letters from the CCP via Hong Kong, asking for money to be sent to certain people in Hong Kong to rescue comrades who were in jail. Each time, we sent a lot of American dollars.”

Such support was reciprocal. Zhang remembered that the Chinese Bureau “often received magazines” from “comrades” in China. Also, the meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Bureau on January 20, 1933, reported that “books bought from contributions to the Chinese Vanguard from comrades in S. U. [Soviet Union] be sent to the RESONANCE,—to the amount of 100.00 R.” (Presumably, R referred to rubles.) The same meeting noted that the “request by comrades in S. U. to reprint coupon with China Soviet currency cannot be complied with, because expense is too great.” The group recommended that the bureau “write comrade in charge with the work there to economies [sic], and use the ‘Map’ coupons.”

Sometime later that year, the bureau appealed to the “American Party”: it “should do more to help the Chinese Revolution than merely passing resolutions.” That is, the Party “should contribute financial aid, at least as much
as it does to Germany." In concrete terms, the CC should “recommend to the membership that it be assessed for the Chinese party the same amount as it is for the German party, money to be transferred to C. C. of Chinese Party for their use; that money be collected in same manner as it is now for the Germans.” This was a bold demand indeed, a testament not only to the strength of the bonds connecting Chinese immigrant Communists in America to revolutionaries inside China but also to the activists’ awareness of the significance of the revolutionary struggle in China to the cause of the “Proletarian World Revolution” and the well-being of Chinese workers in America.136